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**Residents' Destination Image: A Perspective Article**

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Residents’ Destination Image: A Perspective Article

Introduction

Much attention has been paid to the understanding of tourists’ destination image, while local residents’ perception of their place as a tourist destination (residents’ destination image) has received relatively little academic attention. This overlook is also apparent in major literature reviews that have traditionally guided destination image research (e.g., Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Pike, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). Determining residents’ destination image is invaluable for a range of reasons: a) Their image assists in delineating a place’s strengths and weaknesses, contributing to strategic planning that enhances residents’ quality of life; b) image is strongly linked to community satisfaction, sense of pride, sense of place and community, and place attachment, all being vital for the viability of a place; c) residents themselves are often acting as ‘tourists’ in their own area, visiting attractions and events, or accompanying their friends and relatives in their visits. In such visits locals often spend more than usual; d) local residents are part of the destination image itself, determining through their interactions with tourists, the latter’s cultural experience and subsequent destination image formation; e) they are also active information providers, serving as ‘destination ambassadors’, especially for their friends and relatives, significantly affecting others’ intention to visit a destination; f) some locals further immerse into social media platforms offering local expertise, contributing to value co-creation and destination differentiation; g) residents’ destination image is known to affect their level of support for tourism development, thereby influencing tourism planning; and h) through their capacity as tourism employees, they play a key role in visitors’ perceived quality of the destination. Despite the unambiguous importance of conducting research on this field, progress so far is slow and the knowledge produced fragmented. This perspective article discusses development up to date and proposes new avenues for research that will help the field to mature.

Past perspective 75 years of developments 1946-2020

Studies conducted over the past 30 years have focused on exploring local residents’ or local business owners’/employees’ image of a given destination (Schroeder, 1996; Sternquist-

Witter, 1985) or identified subgroups of residents based on the image they hold (Stylidis, 2018). Others compared residents' image vis a vis to that developed by tourists (Henkel et al., 2006; Ku and Mak, 2017; Merrilees et al., 2012; Ryan and Aicken, 2010), while few of them contrasted the image of three groups, namely residents, tourists and tourism employees (Stylidis et al., 2015), or residents, tourists and government representatives (Chan and Marafa, 2016). Lastly, only a handful explored the role resident destination image plays in shaping a) their perception of tourism impacts, b) intention to recommend to others and c) support for tourism development (Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou and Apostolopoulou, 2018; Ramkissoon and Nunkoo, 2011; Stylidis, 2018). These studies shed some light on resident image formulation, identified discrepancies on perceived image among various stakeholder groups and established its position as an antecedent of residents' attitudes towards tourism. Despite their contribution, the restricted and descriptive nature of much of the research calls for a more theoretically informed approach. A lack of consensus is also apparent with regards to the conceptualization and operationalization of the resident destination image construct. Most studies did not commonly provide a definition and an interchangeable use of 'place image' and 'destination image' is noted. Equally, great variation is observed in the measurement items used to capture image- the scales used are often readily adopted from tourist studies, while there is limited attempt for scale development. Within this realm, the vast majority of previous research used quantitative methods. Next, despite the strong theoretical rationale, there is limited empirical evidence documenting the importance of residents' destination image on tourists' own image formulation. Little is also known about the inner motives that lead some residents to act as ambassadors of their place.

Future perspective 75 years 2020-2095

Among the first issues to be addressed in the next decade is the adoption of rigorous theoretical foundations including stakeholder theory, social representation theory, emotional solidarity theory, dependency theory or social identity theory. Such theories can be applied to provide thorough understandings of the various images held by internal vs. external stakeholders including non-visitors (Stylidis and Cherifi, 2018) and/or segments of the local population; to explain how different representations of a destination develop; and what are the main driving forces leading residents' intentional behaviour in that context.

Equally pivotal is the development of global measurement tools to enhance the comparability and transferability of the results. The use of qualitative tools including in-depth interviews, ethnography and focus groups can assist in enhancing knowledge and understanding of residents' images and the inner motives leading them to act as destination ambassadors. Segmentation studies will have to be expanded to include the various nested communities of residents and their corresponding images, representing different perspectives and interests (Komppula, 2016). Additionally, novel techniques offering real time measurement of residents' perceptions and feelings, equal to those used to understand tourists, are expected to gain in popularity (see Shoal et al., 2018). Research on tourists documenting the critical role of residents' image in shaping their perceptions and experiences is also highly needed. Within this context, it gradually becomes difficult to draw a line between residents and tourists as the boundaries between the two are blurred. Tourists are transforming into temporary residents as a result of globalisation including second homes and modern patterns of work, seeking to explore and live in areas outside the tourist traps (Jacobsen and Nogués-Pedregal, 2017). As such, residents' role as local experts might be questioned in the future. Next, the digitization of travelling including virtual reality is expected to have a massive impact on the means through which local residents are going to share their knowledge and co-create value for tourists, thereby determining their experience. This inevitably generates a whole new context within which the role of residents' destination image needs to be explored and understood. Last but not least, the development of space tourism in the next decades is expected to affect human relationships and the guest-host inter-relationships in unpredictable ways. Future research altogether will not only enhance our understanding of this elusive concept but help tourism managers to develop strategies to benefit from the encounters between residents and tourists based on the context, expectations, etc.

Conclusions

The need to expand our knowledge and understanding of residents' destination image in the future is unquestionable. This paper briefly presented the first era of research on residents' destination image, and critiqued its predominantly descriptive nature. Areas that seek further attention along with directions for future research have been highlighted including the need for rigorous theoretical foundations; design of global measurement

instruments; wider application of qualitative and quantitative tools; along with a better understanding of the diverse role of residents in the digital context.

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